

Camas to celebrate centennial with plans for development

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CAMAS — This Columbia River town is preparing to celebrate its 100th anniversary this week with civic leaders hoping the next century will bring major development to the city.

Camas hasn't changed much during its first century, a local historian says, but city officials are laying plans to accommodate growth.

The town began as a center for a paper mill site, which was selected by a group of Portland investors for its potential water power. The investors were led by former Oregonian publisher Henry Pittock who wanted a mill to provide newsprint for the paper, local historian Milton Bona, former editor of The Camas Post Record, said.

More than 3,000 acres were purchased by the investors, LaCamas Colony Co., in 1883. The town site was announced by the company in May 1883 and was developed within a year, Bona said.

A 640-acre parcel of land was cleared, the town laid out, and the mill built by 1884 with an estimated population of 2,000, according to Camas Historical Society records.

Long before the investors had become interested in the Camas region, Chinook Indians had harvested the bulb of the camas plant, which

abounded around Lacamas Lake and the Indians gathered frequently in the area, Bona said. The town was named after the plant, which still thrives around Lacamas Lake.

Later the town's name was changed to LaCamas and was officially shortened to Camas by the post office.

Gradually the town expanded to include a commercial area, schools, a newspaper and churches. The mill became a part of the Crown Zellerbach Corp., which has remained a central economic figure in the town's growth.

Streets, stores and the mill are easily recognized in photographs of Camas taken at the turn of the century. The town's population has remained stable since the Great Depression. "We really haven't changed much," Bona said.

Local civic and business leaders predict that the next 100 years will bring major cultural and industrial changes to the community but that many of the century-old community pillars, such as the mill and schools, will remain the same.

The Crown Zellerbach Corp. pulp and paper mill is gearing up for its next century in Camas with a modernization project that will cost \$425 million by the time it is completed in the summer of 1984, regional communications manager Carol Eckert said.

"The plan is to modernize and upgrade the



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facility by installing new systems that will provide additional service to the business and communications market. The mill has supported generations of people that have worked there, and the modernization will help ensure that the mill will continue to be a stable economic entity in Camas," Eckert said.

The City Council has been working on a comprehensive annexation and development plan that would expand the city boundaries west to 164th Avenue and provide a steppingstone for major industrial expansion during the next century, Mayor Donald Christianson said.

The effect of the plan during the next 100 years would completely change the economic and cultural centers of Camas, he said.

"I envision a growth in light industry in the Fisher Basin area, a fair amount of high technology industry coming here, a number of shopping centers being built, and a high-technology college existing somewhere in the future," he said.

His overall image of Camas in 2083 would be a combination of a thriving commercial center — including a major airport — with the atmosphere of a university town, and real estate values and homes around Lacamas Lake similar to that of Lake Oswego, Ore.

"We have one of the most beautiful settings in the state, a tax structure which is beneficial to industry, and a stable quality-type work force. There isn't any question about the town's growth. It is growing and will continue to grow," Christianson said.

He said the development of a cultural center for drama or musical productions is inevitable.

Camas school Superintendent Richard C. Mariotti said he doesn't believe the basic structure of the school system will change much during the next 100 years, but it will include more community cultural activities.

"We need to have a place where the community could have cultural productions. There aren't any facilities for this in the community now, and if we improve the school's auditorium and athletic facilities, there would be a place," Mariotti said.

"The goals of education will not change though. I have always believed in the three aims of education that have existed since the Greeks. They are preparing students for work, active citizenship and private personal cultivation. The schools will become the major cultural and educational hub for the whole community, but technology will not change the teaching methods very much," he said.